# A CHAPLAIN PERSPECTIVE ON MORALE

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Writing for Publication
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11 May 1973

# P R E F A C E

My interest in morale was stimulated during a recent tour in Germany where I was able to observe closely the change in the morale of individuals and the change in the esprit de corps of the units. In some cases I was able to relate the changes to leadership practices or other sociological environmental influences, but often I felt that the changes were due to psychological factors.

It is the intent of this paper to present what I feel is a workable understanding of morale and esprit de corps from the chaplain's perspective and to point out the need for the training of chaplains in the area of morale and esprit de corps.

I want to thank CH (COL) Elmer (Jim) Ammerman for his encouragement and his willingness to act as a sounding board for my ideas. I want to thank MAJ Richard R. Coates for his critique and suggestions in writing this paper.

I personally accept the inadequacies of the paper. There are many short commings. Many difficulties were encountered in finding material available on the subject. At least twenty-two articles have been written on the subject since 1965 in military publications, but only six were available for research. Two important recent books came to my attention too late in the period of research to be included in this paper. These books are: The American Enlisted Man by Charles C. Moskos and The Professional Soldier by Morris Janowitz. It should be noted that neither of these two books are in the USACHS library.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS.

Morale, esprit and esprit de corps are three terms that are sometimes used interchangeagly. The dictionary distinguishes between esprit and esprit de corps but it refers to morale as being of 'troops',[1] and gives little distinction between morale and esprit de corps. In the Army Field Manual on Military Leadership the two terms are distinguished as follows: "Morale. The state of mind of the individual. This depends upon his attitude toward everything that affects him. . . . Esprit de Corps. Loyalty to, pride in, and enthusiasm for a unit shown by its members."[2] In this paper the military definition of morale will be followed except when quoting writers who sometimes use morale as referring to a group and not individuals. Morale will be used as referring to the attitude of an individual and esprit de corps will be used to refer to the spirit of the unit.

Morale and esprit de corps are inter-related and they mutually influence one another. To ask which one is the most important is like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg? But even after identifying who you mean when you talk about morale or esprit de corps, you haven't really identified morale or espirt de corps. To define

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[1] C. L. Barnhart. ed. in chief. The American College Dictionary. (New York: Random House. 1961)

[2] FM 22-100. Military Leadership. (Hqs Dept of the Army. Washington DC. Nov 65) p7.

morale you must eventually tell what it does and what effects it has.

> Morale may be defined as the individual's state of mind. It depends upon his attitude toward everything that affects him--his fellow soldier, his leaders, Army life in general, and other things which seem important to him. Morale is closely related to the satisfying of a man's basic human needs. . . . High morale is a positive state of mind which gives the soldier a feeling of confidence and well-being that enables him to face hardship with courage, endurance, and determination.[3]

This definition of morale from the Field Manual is as complete as any given by any other writer. Meier in his glossary gives the following definition and adds a statement about weak morale.

> Morale. The relative degree to which a soldier is mentally fortified against loss of competence as a military effective. High morale is characterized by zeal, eagerness, resolution, and good emotional tone. Weak morale grades down to its complete absence in demoralization.[4]

Both of these definitions stress the intangible nature of morale and the effects that the morale has on the performance of the soldier. Both of the definitions also view morale from the perspective of the leader or the commander. It should be remembered that a person may have a high morale or a unit may have high esprit de corps and that the energy of these feelings can be directed against the commander or the institution, which in this case would be the Army.[5] A commander will say that a group has high esprit de corps when the energy of the group is

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[3] FM 22-100. p26.

[4] Norman C. Meier. Military Psychology. (New York: William Morrow & Co. 1947) p376.

[5] Samuel A. Stouffer, et al. Studies in Social Psychology In World War II. Vol I. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1949) p84.

directed to accompolish his goals, when in fact, there could be just as high esprit de corps with just as much energy output directed against the commander and his goals.

MacCurdy recognizes this negative aspect of esprit de corps, but he calls it morale, when he says: "Morale that is either strikingly 'good' or glaringly 'bad' means that there is unanimity of action in the group which is exhibiting gallantry or cowardice."[6] When there is a high degree of unanimity of action in a group it should not be labelled 'bad'. A high degree of unanimity of action in a group should be considered high esprit de corps, even when the objectives of the action are contradictory to the objectives of the commander. In the same way, high morale should be viewed as the ability of the individual to maintain an outlook on life that will result in productive action and not anomie. This ability of the individual can be hampered by poor leadership or aided by good leadership, but leadership should not be considered the most important causative factor of morale. Morale is more than the result of leadership or motivation. Motivation is a tool of leadership that the leader uses to direct his people toward his prescribed goals. Morale is the attitude that the individual has about himself while the leader attempts or succeeds in motivating him.

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[6] J. T. MacCurdy, ScD. MD. The Structure of Morale. (New York: MacMillian Co. 1944) p62.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MORALE.

"Man remains the key element in warfare. How he is developed, trained, and led will determine the success or failure of our arms."[7] All writers consulted in the production of this paper would agree with statement by Ahmad quoted above. Every writer consulted mentioned in one way or another that the turning point of a battle is in the spirit of the men, and not in the genius of the tactician or in the sophistication of the weaponery. Marshall says it best when he writes:

> The time always comes in battle when the decisions of statesmen and of generals can no longer effect the issue and when it is not within the power of our national wealth to change the balance decisively. Victory is never achieved prior to that point; it can be won only after the battle has been delivered into the hands of men who move in the imminent danger of death.[8]

Tolstoy in War and Peace expressed this same concept of the army but he called it the unknown X when he wrote:

> "In warfare the force of armies is the product of the mass multiplied by something else, an unknown x. . . . . X is the spirit of the army, the greater or less desire to fight and to face dangers on the part of all the men composing the army. Which is quite apart from the question whether they are fighting under leaders of genius or not, with cudgels or with guns that fire thirty times a minute."[9]

It seems that both Marshall and Tolstoy are talking about morale and esprit de corps when they mention the spirit of the army and the

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[7] LTC Ijaz Ahmad. "The Soldier, The Battlefield, and Leadership" Military Review. Vol 51 No 5. (May 71) p49.

[8] S. L. A. Marshall. Men Against Fire. (New York: William Morrow & Co. 1947) p208.

[9] Tolstoy. War and Peace. trans. Constance Garnett (McClure, Phillips and Co., New York. 1904) III. Part XIV. p268. cited by Samuel A. Stouffer, et al. Studies in Social Psychology in World War II. (Vol I. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press. 1949) p3.

ability of the individual man to affect the outcome of battles. Marshall is emphatic when he stresses that men must have an external view of something greater than themselves if the nation is to achieve greatness. He goes on to say that when this ethical sense is lacking, "kingdoms become tyrannies."[10] Marshall goes on to conclude that morale and esprit de corps shapes the destiny of nations, but that it is the members of the nation that eventually determine the morale and esprit de corps of the army.

> And so the final and greatest reality, that national strength lies only in the hearts and spirits of men. The Army, Navy, and Air Force are not the guardians of the national security. The tremendous problem of the future is beyond their capacity to solve. The search begins at the cradle where the mother makes the decision, either to tie her child to her apron strings or to rear him as a man. It continues through the years of schooling when children are taught either to place personal interests uppermost or to think in terms of their responsibility toward their society, their country, and all of mankind. It carries into the halls of government where our lawmakers may vote either to awaken our youth to a new understanding of duty or to continue the indulgent course which is more likely to find favor with the majority of their constituents.[11]

Since morale is the key factor in winning a battle and thus a war, and since morale is also the ultimate determinate in the strength of a nation, it holds that the building and forming of a morale and esprit de corps should be the most important goal of a good leader. The Field Manual supports this conclusion.

> Although discipline, esprit de corps, and proficiency are dependent on the degree of morale present, all four are of equal importance. The other three are dependent upon morale because it is the sum total of all the attitudes of the

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[10] S. L. A. Marshall. Men Against Fire. p167.

[11] Ibid. p211.

> individual. It can be said that morale is the fertile soil in which the seeds of discipline, esprit de corps, and proficiency are sown. Thus while you should strive for morale initially, your efforts must always be directed toward building all of the indications of leadership to a high degree.[12]

Here it is shown that even esprit de corps is dependent upon morale and that morale is the one most important ingredient of an army, and it can be said also of a nation.

It is against this background that the chaplain is by regulation given the responsibility of advising the commander in the area of "morale as affected by religion."[13] As a chaplain I have had training in the area of religion and morale, but I am not aware of any class or subject of training designed to teach what morale is, what affects it, or what influence a chaplain may have. To me these are questions that should be considered seriously by every chaplain and by every person responsible for the instruction of chaplains.

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[12] FM 22-100. p26

[13] AR 165-20. Religious Activities. (Hqs Dept of the Army, Washington DC. Aug 72) p2.

A WORKABLE MODEL OF MORALE.

In the absence of any model of morale for a chaplain to use I want to propose a model of my own, drawn from my own experience. During a recent tour in Germany I was assigned to a Hawk Missile Battalion and I was able to observe the morale and esprit de corps of four different units rise and fall without the influence of any other closely related unit. The units functioned almost independently of each other at three different locations. With this degree of separation and independence it was possible to observe the external and internal influences that caused changes in morale and esprit de corps.

At first I was only able to notice the rise and fall of morale by observable results such as performance. Then as I became better acquainted with the men in the units I was able to notice the changes in morale and esprit de corps before performance was affected. In the beginning I did not believe that my observation could be a possibility, but upon talking to a person who evaluated hundreds of units, he said that the objective scores always confirmed what he was able to observe within the first thirty minutes when he visited a unit.

I have found that there are some men in a unit who always have good morale and some men who always have weak morale and some men whose morale varies from day to day. I have found that when the esprit de corps of a unit is low, that the men sense it and they are concerned, but they are not able to identify the reasons of the causes. When esprit de corps is low the men will have many complaints, but the complaints will usually have little to do with the actual causes of the low esprit de corps.

One incident I remember very vividly when the morale and esprit de corps was low and had undergone considerable change in just two days. The only verbal identification that the men were able to give me was that the Coke machine did not work. Four days later the morale and esprit de corps of the unit was much improved, but the Coke machine still did not work. Two weeks later a man came to me with a complaint that explained the reason for the great fluctation in morale in the past. This particular individual's morale was usually high, but it had been necessary for him to work all night on some equipment and he did not feel that it was fair. He said that when the officers wanted to go home for the night, they just called the equipment operational and left. When the battalion commander was able to make the officers honest in reporting the equipment status, the morale and esprit de corps went up immediately.

The final factor that I observed was the type of counseling that I encountered during the periods of low morale and esprit de corps. In reviewing my counseling during the periods of low esprit de corps and morale I found that most of the counseling cases were with men who in one way or another were thinking predominately about themselves. The therapy usaully involved reaffirming the man's own self image and getting him to organize his life and his thinking around something other than his own feelings. Sometimes it was necessary to correct a situation that caused the man to think about his own welfare.

It is my conclusion that when a man feels that he must consider his own welfare and thus organizes his life around himself that his morale decreases. When a man thinks about his job, those around him,

or his unit, then his morale improves and the esprit de corps of the unit increases. I feel that this introvert or extrovert outlook on life is the psychological determinant of morale and thus also of esprit de corps. MacCurdy supports this conclusion when he says, ". . . morale is due to a state of excitement in which the individual is forgetful of self when morale is 'good' or, when it is 'bad', a mental contagion encourages him to think of himself alone."[14] Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen also supports this conclusion when he speaks from the battle ground of Sicily and declares, "men do not fight for a cause but because they do not want to let their commrades down."[15]

Two poor leadership practices I observed that had extreme influence on the level of morale and esprit de corps were the practice of favoritism and the false reporting of equipment readiness. When the men felt that the commander or leader (this applies to NCO leaders too) was playing favorites, they felt that the leader would not treat them justly and that they must take care of themselves. When the men observed the leaders falsifying reports, they concluded that the leaders would lie when it was advantageous to do so. Therefore the men felt that they must take care of themselves because the leader was only looking out for his own welfare. It must be noted that it is not necessary for the leaders to actually practice favoritism or to actually falsify reports for the men to feel that they must look out for themselves. It is only necessary for the men to think that the leaders have done these things.

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[14] MacCurdy. The Structure of Morale. p72.

[15] Major General Terry Allen summarized by S. L. A. Marshall in Men Against Fire p 161. No reference given for the statement.

This theory of morale also explains why family circumstances and other situations that adversely affect an individual will cause low morale for that individual, but not normally cause low esprit de corps in the unit. When circumstances dictate that the man must be concerned with his welfare and the welfare of his family, then his morale decreases. But when the men in the unit observe that the man is given reasonable personal attention, then they conclude that they too will be helped if the need arises and the esprit de corps of the unit will improve because they feel that their welfare is being protected and that they can trust their leaders.

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED.

Some recent articles written about morale do not reveal a thorough understanding of the subject. An article written by the staff of LG Bruce Palmer Jr. mentions many things that helped the morale of the men in Vietnam. The article mentions medical support, good meals, the American Forces Vietnam Radio Network, the Stars and Stripes, the exchange facilities, the R&R program, the USO clubs, and the chaplains as being the major factors aside from good leadership that account for the high morale of troops in Vietnam.[16] In another article COL William Hanks mentions that the use of time, personal hygiene, individual appearance, food, religious programs, character guidance, and the counseling of the chaplains are important factors in maintaining high morale.[17]

I agree that all of these factors may be an aid to help improve morale but I feel that these factors have an effect because they indicate to the soldier that his welfare is being considered. It is interesting that nowhere in either of the articles is there any mention of treating the soldier as a human being with dignity as having any bearing on morale. Herein lies the greatest challenge that any commander faces: How to send men into battle and yet at the same time to be concerned with their welfare and to treat them with dignity as human beings. To help the commander in this area is perhaps the greatest responsibility that the chaplain has. Marshall compares the treatment

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[16]"Troup Morale in Vietnam and Why It Is So High" Army. (Vol 17 Oct 67) pp 14-16.

[17]COL William R. Hanks. "The New Soldier's Morale" Army. (Vol 17 Oct 67) p 54.

of soldiers without regard to the dignity of the individual to a soulless religion. "There is nothing more soulless than a religion without good works unless it be a patriotism which does not concern itself with the welfare and dignity of the individual."[18]

A check of the studies done by the Combat Development Command and other branches of the Army since 1965 did not reveal any studies about morale and/or esprit de corps. The most recent study done on morale available for research in this paper is by Stouffer and others who worked for the Research Branch of the Army during World War II.[19] The Research Branch recognized their own inadequacy in dealing with the measurement of morale[20] and they felt that the importance of the subject would produce many peacetime studies.

> There are few practical problems facing social sciences more urgent than that of studying leadership experimentally and developing some tested hypotheses to replace the copybook maxims that now fill most manuals on leadership, whether written for the Army, for industry, or for organizations like the YMCA. Considerable peacetime progress can be expected.[21]

It does not seem that much peacetime progress has been realized. If man is still the most important element in any war,[22] it seems that much more research should be done about the morale of men and the esprit de corps of groups.

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[18]Marshall. Men Against Fire. p 162.

[19]Samuel A. Stouffer, et al. Studies in Social Psychology in World War II. 4 Vols.

[20]Stouffer et al. Vol I. p 85.

[21]Stouffer et al. Vol I. p 363.

[22]Ahmad. Military Review. (Vol 51 No 5) p 49.

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